

# Culture and education: towards a comprehensive approach

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**Developing coherent and sustained public policies that take into account the relationship between culture and education is a complex task. The aim of this text is to contribute to the construction of a broad perspective on the relationship between these two areas based on a comprehensive approach to cultural policies and educational policies. Without ignoring the traditional approach to the relationship between education and culture, we take this opportunity to extend the debate and to identify aspects that have not always received sufficient attention. After presenting the framework of analysis, we will describe the situation in Catalonia and end with some proposals for discussing and establishing future lines of work.**

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### Between the segmented approach and the comprehensive approach

The relationship between culture and education cannot be analysed without taking into account the current context of marked social and economic transformations that, in many cases, result in great inequalities. Rather than strictly a period of crisis, we are in an interregnum between two periods (Bauman, 2012), a change of era that is reflected in significant changes in everyday life (Subirats, 2011). This context involves complex and multidimensional public problems that are impossible to understand and address from a strictly technocratic approach based on segmentation and disciplinary boundaries. The literature on public policy has described these problems as “cursed” because the situations generate uncertainty and discrepancies between the players and social groups involved, and therefore go beyond the habitual practice of public administrations (Brugué *et al.*, 2013). This challenge is key to understanding the relationship between culture and education, and to analysing the current responses of public policies in these areas.

Social inequalities and the dynamics of multidimensional exclusion have led to an increase in the burden on the formal educational space, which has not generally been accompanied by changes in the understanding of the educational experience. In both education policy and cultural policy, education is still seen largely as being limited to what happens at school. Problems that do not originate in the classroom or the playground but clearly emerge in these spaces are often not addressed suitably through new resources and methodologies. The recent UNESCO document, *Rethinking education. Towards a global common good?*, which formulates the objective of “learning to learn”, reaffirms a humanistic vision of education and states that “Education is the deliberate process of acquiring knowledge and developing the competencies to apply that knowledge in relevant situations. The development and use of knowledge are the ultimate purposes of education.”

The presence of culture in education can be analysed from the hitherto traditional lines of public intervention: on the one hand, the formal structures of education, including school curricula and arts education, and on the other hand, educational services of cultural facilities and institutions such as museums and theatres. Though culture in non-formal education is not strictly dependent on public funding, we should not minimize its importance, as in the offer of extracurricular activities and in educational and recreational programmes promoted by leisure organizations. All of these forms of training and stimulation clearly contribute to the formation of ethical, civic and of course cultural values. Finally, the relationship between culture and education has also been approached from the social impact perspective (Barbieri *et al.*, 2011). From this perspective, the relationship between these two areas is presented under the idea that art and culture can contribute to the development of personal and professional skills and competencies. In particular, measures are implemented (and the impact is measured) in order to improve the academic performance of students.

Without underestimating the positive impact of many initiatives based on this perspective, it is useful to reflect on some of its limitations and to consider possible alternatives for dealing with the challenge of comprehensiveness. An approach mainly based on the externalities of culture, on the instrumental capacities of cultural policies to contribute to educational objectives constructed from the viewpoint of segmentation, has hindered the development of comprehensive answers to broad-based problems. These “cursed” problems should not be dealt with through solutions designed largely to demonstrate their instrumental value. They require policies based on a cross-cutting approach to the public value of culture and its relationship with permanent values such as justice and fairness.

This comprehensive approach can be detected and explained through hybrid experiences between the fields of culture and education (and others), which go beyond understanding education strictly as formal school education and culture as a lever for doing more efficiently what we have been doing so far. The approach can also be seen in the diverse players and spaces that generate both culture and education: respecting their particular missions and interests, these cultural-educational players are recognized as interdependent and complementary. The comprehensive approach goes beyond a self-referential and instrumental vision and recognizes the centrality of citizens in the cultural process of education. Without agency, without a commitment to collective projects (beyond the individual and private sphere), it is difficult to deal with citizenship, education and culture.

Some examples to consider in this regard are the contemporary concept of public libraries, social innovation projects based on the magnet philosophy, the idea of educating cities as a key element in the debate on smart cities, and the service learning methodology. In addition, with the implementation of new technologies, digitization has made available new resources of communication and training that promote access to culture. The experiences based on these frameworks in Catalonia will be explained in the next section.

## The situation in Catalonia

The relationship between culture and education in Catalonia and the (dis-)connection between cultural and educational policies fits the conceptual framework presented above. In culture, as in education, the complex and multidimensional collective problems have generally been approached from a perspective of public policies segmented by disciplines. Though some educational cultural experiences have attempted to overcome this segmentation, and have even become consolidated, we have not observed a structural and structured policy in this regard.

As Gemma Carbó (2013) stated, cultural policy and educational policy in Catalonia show more differences than similarities. The separation between public administrations and the distribution of powers in the public sector limit the possibility of drafting and implementing policies focusing on participation in cultural life through the education of citizens. In addition to the institutional constraints, another key factor is that many cultural and educational players think that partnership between the two areas is impossible, or even undesirable.

However, some experiences (and analytical contributions) have progressed towards a comprehensive approach such as that presented above. A contribution that has generated both cultural and educational processes is one that sees the medium as an educational reality. The “Educating Cities” projects (Trilla, 1999) reflect the evolution of the relationship between the school and the community: education goes beyond school and permeates all reality (Puig, 2009). This analysis is also valid for cultural organizations, which in many cases (without disregarding their specificities) form part of these processes.

In this regard, we should mention some hybrid experiences that generate cultural-educational processes<sup>1</sup> in terms of their subject matter and in terms of the players and spaces involved. One is that of public libraries, particularly those that have been configured as, and form part of, a cultural and educational network. These facilities have striven to go beyond education defined strictly as formal school education and culture

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1 As we are unable to present all the examples of good practices (or the most significant cases), we will use a few to analyse some key issues.



defined only as a heritage to be preserved and protected institutionally. They have gone beyond their role as repositories of written culture to become complex spaces of socialization and access to knowledge. However, public libraries are indicative of some of the challenges of proximity policies, in which some cultural and educational facilities have functioned more as a tool for urban change. These facilities have also been presented from the instrumental viewpoint of the impact of cultural policies. We have advanced greatly in the measurement of the socioeconomic impact of public libraries, but less in the assessment of their (cultural and educational) public value. There is still room to develop the tools that allow us to know (and make public decisions accordingly) the cross-cutting effects of public libraries, such as whether or not they help autonomous creative development, the democratization of the media to generate knowledge, and the participation of certain groups in cultural life.

Another type of educational cultural experience to take into account are the social innovation projects based on the magnet philosophy. Magnet schools seek to provide a comprehensive response to the problem of urban and educational segregation. The strategy is based on curricular or pedagogical specialization through collaboration with socially recognized institutions, often in the cultural sphere (museums, music schools, research centres, etc.) (Tarabini, 2013).<sup>2</sup> A project inspired by this philosophy, albeit with certain peculiarities, is “4 Cordes” (4 Strings), which is carried out at the Germanes Bertomeu School in Mataró in collaboration with the Municipal School of Music and L’Auditori, among other players. The project starts with music classes in violin and cello for students in the third and fourth years of primary school, although the activity also includes the presentation of the group at L’Auditori, as well as participation in various activities in the district (Rocafonda) and the city. The impacts include not only elements of access to, and participation in, the cultural life of children, but also the empowerment of vulnerable groups and the transformation of relations between the school, families, the neighbourhood and the city. The project has encouraged schools to be perceived by families and neighbourhood stakeholders (and part of the rest of the city) as a place of equality and transformation of the troubled reality of the neighbourhood, rather than places of exclusion and marginalization associated by some with the high percentage of immigrant children. It is a project that combats segregation but it must be placed in the context of a neighbourhood with serious and persistent socio-spatial problems.<sup>3</sup>

Another comprehensive approach to the relationship between culture and education is service learning, a proposal that combines the processes of learning and community service in a single, well-organized project in which the participants learn while working to improve society on the basis of its real needs (Puig *et al.*, 2006). These projects make it easier to break the segmentation between culture and education, between public administrations and social partners and between institutions and communities. An example of this is the project “Fem un Museu” (Let’s Make A Museum) in Sant Cugat, where members of the municipal art workshops form “pairs of artists” with people with disabilities, create a body of work and organize an exhibition.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, in the “Polièdrica” (Multifaceted)<sup>5</sup> wiki platform on local cultural policies and collaborative and mediation-based artistic and cultural practices, education takes on a key role. Coordinated by the Sinapsis and Transductores groups, this project promotes research, exchange, discussion and dissemination of policies and practices that could be described as cultural education.

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2 Examples of this type are the projects promoted by the Jaume Bofill Foundation and the Department of Education, such as collaborations between the Catalan Institute of Paleontology and the Samuntada School of Sabadell, and between the MAC-BA and the Moisès Broggi Institute. In the latter case the Sala Beckett and the A Bao AQu organization are also involved.

3 For a detailed analysis, see Barbieri (2014).

4 Another example is the “XL Lletra Gran” (XL Large Print) project in El Vendrell, which disseminates library resources and materials to health centres through the collaboration of students on the social healthcare module of the Andreu Nin Institute. For further information, see the experience bank of the Service Learning Promotion Centre ([www.aprenentatgeservei.cat/](http://www.aprenentatgeservei.cat/)). An example in which students’ extracurricular activities coincide with creation in the field of performing arts is the theatre company of the Pablo Ruiz Picasso secondary school in Torre Baró, directed since 2002 by Luïsa Casas with the support of the teaching staff. The stage projects resulting from this experience are obvious examples of how culture can become fundamental in learning and social inclusion processes.

5 [www.poliedrica.cat/](http://www.poliedrica.cat/).

## Proposals for debate and action

The diverse hybrid cultural experiences generated by cultural-educational processes contrast with the lack of structural and structured educational and cultural policies. Institutional constraints often prevail over attempts to find comprehensive answers to multidimensional problems. However, the conditions for bringing culture and education closer together are there to be exploited. We wish to conclude by proposing two strategies for advancing in this direction, with no pretence of originality and with the desire to be at least of some utility.

The first can be summarized in two words: recognition and collaboration. First, recognition of the limits of traditional cultural and educational institutions helps deal with the complex and multidimensional problems. Inequalities are not limited to the educational-school dimension or to the cultural-institutional dimension, or even to both; rather, they are interdependent agents. There is therefore a need for collaboration between public, private and community organizations that define themselves as educational and cultural, and for collaboration with other areas, on the basis of active and participatory citizenship. Second, collaboration ensures fairness and justice in the provision of services, but especially in the fulfilment of rights. A brief scenario of collaboration would include a) identifying the resources that people and communities need to deal with diagnoses built collaboratively; b) determining responsibilities according to the areas in which each organization is best prepared and equipped; and c) in doing so, respecting the mission and objectives of each player, and assuming differences and conflicts in the establishment of values and norms.

The second strategy, complementary to the first, is summed up in two concepts: evaluation and action, or evaluation action. In cultural and educational policies and programmes, evaluation is now needed and demanded by many organizations, working teams and even citizens at large. However, we have not made sufficient progress in this regard. As we understand it here, evaluation is an exercise in transparency and accountability, but it is fundamentally a collective learning process that can help establish bonds of trust and interdependence between players in culture and education. Evaluation is not primarily a technical (or technocratic) task, but it should generate useful knowledge for decision making. It involves democratic evaluation and the right to evaluation, the possibility of evaluating processes and outcomes of policies and programmes, and doing so through evaluation action projects fed by proposals of action research. A public programme in this regard, debated and developed in collaboration between various players, and ensuring the participation of individuals and communities, could help advance towards a comprehensive relationship between culture and education.

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